

STUDENT, STATE ADVISER DAUOD DISCUSSES MUSLIM LIFE IN AMERICA

WASHINGTON, APRIL 2 -- Kareema Dauod, a post-graduate student at Georgetown University and adviser to Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes, discussed life in America as a Muslim woman and her efforts to help foster dialogue and understanding between Americans and Muslims worldwide.

Following is the transcript:

(begin transcript)

The close of women's history month provides the backdrop for IIP's continued discussion of women's issues with a webchat featuring Kareema Dauod speaking on life in America as a Muslim woman and her efforts to help create a dialogue and foster understanding between Americans and Muslims worldwide. Dauod will respond to questions on her life as a Muslim-American and her recent experiences reaching out to young Muslims around the world.

Kareema Dauod currently is pursuing a doctorate in Arabic language, literature and linguistics at Georgetown University. She also is serving in the State Department where she works on public diplomacy initiatives involving the Middle East. She is fluent in Arabic, German, French and English.

WEBCHAT MODERATOR: Good morning, good day, and good evening to our webchat participants throughout the world! We will begin our chat in just a few moments. We are receiving your questions. Your questions and the answers from our guest will appear once the webchat begins today, March 30 at 1500 GMT. Please visit our homepage for more information:
<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html>.

KAREEMA DAUOD: Good morning and thank you for the healthy interest in this subject. Allow me to introduce myself briefly. My name is Kareema Dauod, and I am a PhD student in Arabic Linguistics at Georgetown University. At the same time, I work with Under Secretary Karen Hughes at the State Department on Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, specifically Muslim Outreach and Empowerment. As Ms. Hughes always

says, the road to dialogue is two ways: we need to understand one another, and others need to understand us in this ever-increasing globalized world.

There may be differences, but in fact I believe that the world can and is coming closer together. My going mantra in life is that the Clash of Civilizations paradigm should not exist: East and West get along, and I am Living Proof. :)

IRC Addis Ababa: Aselamaleykum, I am Halima Mohammednur from Ethiopia. I recently graduated from the department of Political Science and International Relations, Addis Ababa University.

QUESTION [Jaona]: What it means to be a Muslim in America? How do the majority of Americans view Muslim? Do Muslims feel they are fully integrated in the mainstream of American life?

ANSWER [Kareema Dauod]: Dear Joana, thank you for your response. I think your question is a good one to start with. Being a Muslim in America is no different in my opinion than being a Christian or a Jew for that matter. Of course, we have some differences in our beliefs, but the beauty about this country is that we are or once were all minorities. The Jews and the Irish Catholics, as Dr. Esposito, once said were once ostracized and discriminated against in the world, but today they are recognized first and foremost as Americans.

Muslims are almost there, and in fact are doing there job to integrate into this society: I do my share, the Islamic Society of North America does its share, we are all trying. Elhamdu lillah, I lead a good life and feel proud to be an American. The ignorance that exists is neither religiously driven nor culturally driven; it is not American, Arab, or otherwise: it is what it is: a lack of education. Over time, we hope and pray that all will be understanding of one another.

WEBCCHAT MODERATOR: You can learn more facts about the Muslim community in the U.S. here:

<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/muslimlife/demograp.htm>.

Q [Dr. Ali Al-Hail]: As an Arab\Muslim Fulbright Visiting Professor in the pre and post 9\11 era in a number of key US's universities, I found no bad experiences while teaching and living in the US. Have you ever come cross any bad experiences?

Do you believe in the notion that, 'moral panic' has for centuries been predominating Muslims and Westerners' relationships? Do you think that, 9/11 has been only, further stirred up these relationships that, have always been subjected to emotions and moral judgment.

A: Salaamaat Dr. Ali-Hail, Thank your for your early interest in this webchat. First of all, congratulations on your Fulbright-designation. Ma sha allah, that is quite an honor for anyone.

I would have to second your remarks on my life experiences as an American in America. I personally, thank God, have not encountered discrimination. But, as I stated in Joana's response, ignorance is rampant everywhere. We all have to remember that after 9/11, this country was in great fear and uncertainty about its future, its safety, and its livelihood. Many forgot that Muslims live in America, too, and we were similarly afraid. Unfortunately, fear often turns to rage, and that rage is spurned by the aforementioned ignorance. So, if your question is [whether there] were there innocent victims, my answer is yes, but they were Sikh, Jewish, and others, as well.

WEBCCHAT MODERATOR: Did you know there are more than 1200 mosques in the U.S.? You can learn more about Muslim contributions to the United States in our online publication "Muslim Life in America"
<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/muslimlife/>.

Q [Dr. Ali Al-Hail]: Kareema, Here's me again, if I may ask you another question; do you agree that Arabs\Muslims lack a great deal of political lobbying, PR and grassroots campaigning in the US and the West as a whole? Don't you agree that, it's time that, Arabs\Muslims thinkers in the US and the West should embark on such an initiative? At this moment alas, Muslims, in my own experience don't seem to have 'good' spokespersons.

Do you mind to pass on my own experience; I did that, at Indianola College, Drake University and virtually, every place at Indianola and Des Moines. I have to tell you that, for some reason I have remarkably, succeeded in introducing positive image of/about Arabs\Muslims. I had managed to change lots of negative stereotypes as regard to Islam, women in Islam, and so forth. I'm sorry for my lengthy questions and comments.

Professor, Dr. Ali Al-Hail AlMahmoud

A: Dear Dr. Ali, good to hear from you again. My personal opinion is that if one feels part of one's own country, one should feel empowered to try to make a difference therein. I do believe that Arabs and Muslims can do a better job of not only lobbying but also running for office. The beauty of this country, though, is that that option is available. We are after all a nation of immigrants!

WEBCCHAT MODERATOR: Native Deen is a Muslim rap group from Washington D.C., learn about them here:
<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/muslimlife/rap.htm>.

Q [Connect Bangladesh]: I am surprised to learn that there are 1200 mosques in the US. I think this is good enough to understand the religious tolerance in the country. I feel that the US needs to tell the people in the Muslim world how they have accommodated the Muslim cultures into the mainstream American cultures and society. The US should launch a campaign to remove the misunderstanding about status of Muslim in America. This cannot be done overnight indeed. I hope that public diplomacy section will come up with more initiatives to remove the existing misunderstanding and stereotypes. Nazrul Islam

Bangladesh

WEB CHAT MODERATOR: In 2001, the following U.S. states had the highest number of mosques:

California -- 227

New York -- 140

New Jersey -- 86

Pennsylvania & Texas -- 67

There are also three mosques in Alaska and two in Hawaii.

IRC Addis Ababa: Hi this is Nejat from Ethiopia.

Q. How are Muslim women treated in US Colleges, especially those who wear headscarves? Is there any difference on people's attitude before and after 9/11?

A: Salaam Nejat, and thank you for your question. I personally attend Georgetown University, so I will comment on that. There are a lot of international students attending our school and living in the DC Metro area. A lot of them, in fact, are my best friends, but then again, I am Muslim. :) I will tell you that elhamdu lillah, DC is a place of diversity and tolerance for the most part. America is full of such regions: LA, Dearborn, Michigan, NY, etc. Beauty is diversity. Wearing a headscarf is, of course, a personal choice, and one that many respect. Cases where a woman wearing a scarf or a man wearing a Scottish kilt or a Jewish man wearing a yarmulke are discriminated against, are few in fact, thank God, but sensationalism makes the news, and that is what we see. Why does it happen: I will stress it again-ignorance, not because of 'moral panic' or "Islamophobia," per se. Muslims have a responsibility, just like any other religious or ethnic group, of better integrating (not assimilating) into their societies, and letting the truth be known about Islam and the fact that they are American and simultaneously Muslim. I will tell you that my family, elhamdu lillah has succeeded in that, and a lot of them do wear headscarves.

WEBCCHAT MODERATOR: An "IRC" is an Information Resource Center located in a U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Q [Gulshan]:

1. Dear Kareema Dauod I see you are the educated and clever woman and you found your way in life can you answer me please what about other emigrants who hasn't high education or may be no education at all?

2. What differences between the Arabians and US people?

3. Can American marry Muslim, If not, why?

4. Kareema what is your main aim?

5. Do you want go back home, If not, why?

6. How did you get to USA?

7. Can you say about you dream and you future plans?

On behalf of project group students from Tajikistan, Istaravshan ILC.

A: Greetings to Tajikistan. I am honored by your curiosity and interest and will do my best to answer some of your questions. Unfortunately, for lack of time, and to get around to everyone's questions, I will only answer a handful now though. :)

I am in fact American and grew up in America. My parents were immigrants, my mother from Germany, and my father from Jerusalem, Palestine pre 1948. We are all Americans and proud of the opportunities available to us. I will tell you that my parents, like most immigrant families, came to this country with very little money, but with the hopes and aspirations of achieving the American Dream. My father worked as a guard nights to pay his way through college, for example. I consider myself blessed that he did

that because my life, now as a first generation American, has been so much easier. Still, I had to work hard to receive scholarships, to get admitted into Georgetown, and to work at the State Department. It is an open bidding process, equally competitive for all. My answer to you: where there is a will, there is a way. Whatever God wishes for you to hope and you try make to happen will happen in sha allah. My goal is to work for my government and to build bridges of understanding between Arabs, Muslims, Americans, Europeans, and the rest of the world.

Learning languages is key and being open-minded.

In terms of your third question, the Holy Quran states that a Muslim man can marry a woman as long as she is a person of "The Book," i.e. Jewish, Muslim, or Christian. That does not exclude Americans or other nationalities for that matter. Vice versa, Americans, such as myself, Muslim and non, choose their spouses based on compatibility not looks or nationality.

Hope that helps.

WEBCCHAT MODERATOR: Sally asks:

Q: Hi, This is sally lantaya, from Philippines, I would like to know about the Muslim culture and how the man will treat his wife.....I'm very interesting to find out and hoping to have some true information about Muslim guy who live back there.

In fact, I have now a boyfriend from Houston, and we will going to meet in person by July...and he is a Muslim.

Thats all for now, I'm looking forward for your help about all information regarding Muslim person have a good day.....

A: Hi Sally, Congratulations on your recent engagement. I am not a marriage specialist, nor do I claim to be, but I do believe that a woman is equal to a man in Islam. There is not one Muslim culture but one Islamic faith that preserves that equality. If you love the man, I am sure he is a good man, but I honestly would advise you to seek out an Imam or a sheikh whose opinions you respect to discuss issues like inheritance, dowry, etc. You might want to ask your fiancée for his in Houston. My Imam at Georgetown is actually very qualified on this matter and you can contact him. Just Google search "Yahya Hendi." Good luck.

WEBCCHAT MODERATOR: Would you like to know more about how the U.S. is governed? If so, please visit our online publication <http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/abtamerica/index.htm>.

Q [Connect Bangladesh]: Hi Dauod, I am Monira, 29, and I work as a teacher with a high school that work with the ECA supported Global Connections and Exchange Project Bangladesh. I think the topic of the chat is very timely for us. I am a Muslim woman and have some relatives who are now living in America. I am concerned of their well being now because I sometimes hear bad news about the situation of Muslim in the country. I hear that they are now being marginalized in American society. I also heard that the Muslim people are often threatened. What do you think about this situation? Can you give me some words of hope?

A: Hi Monira, You can call me Kareema. :) Congratulations on having such a great job. My sense is that Muslims have to try just as hard as any other minority in this country and any country for that matter to fit in. I am not saying that marginalization is fair or just, but it happens everywhere. I have to tell you, though, that I did live in Germany a few years back and my experience was far worse.

I think many should understand though again the fear some Americans feel because of 9/11: many did lose family members in these attacks-in fact, my mom almost died, so Muslims and Arabs right now just have to try a little extra hard to make it clear that they are just as American as everyone else and show that loyalty. One of my bosses, Dina Habib Powell, is Egyptian-American, and ma sha allah, pretty established, and in sha allah I too hope to run for an office one day. But we all have to do our share. Keep up the good work. It is people like you who make the world a better place to live in.

Q [Sharipov]: Will the Moslems more pray at home or at Mosque?

A: Hi Sharipov, Thanks for the question. Muslims are free to pray at home or at the Mosque: both.

Q [Connect Bangladesh]: Hi Kareema, This is Nazrul Islam and I work as a Program Director of the Global Connections and Exchange Program-Bangladesh (www.connect-bangladesh.org), a US department supported project that promotes mutual understanding between the youth in Bangladesh and USA through using computers and Internet. The project impacts both on Americans and Bangladeshi youth. They get opportunity to learn each other and we believe knowing each other is first step to remove misunderstanding and some stereotypes.

As I see in your biography you have helped to create dialogue and foster understanding between Americans and Muslims worldwide. I appreciate your works. I would like to learn what efforts are most important to initiate to foster the understanding in a time when the relationship between America and Muslim world is being considered as crucial for peace and stability of our world. Who should initiate these efforts and who are the stakeholders in this process?

Thanks, Nazrul Islam

Bangladesh

nazrul@schoolsonline.org

A: Dear Nazrul Islam, first of all thank you for your question and I applaud your efforts in Bangladesh. I think, in part, you've answered your own question in that you are already doing your share by "leading by example" and improving the image of Muslims at home and abroad. In conjunction with another question asked earlier by Mohhamed Nasir in Ethiopia, I would like to say that, the work environment I have here at the State Department under Karen Hughes is very conducive to all Americans, irrespective of their religious beliefs. I have an equal voice. As Ms. Hughes stated, and I mentioned before, the road to dialogue is two way: we as Muslims have to engage our communities, and we must be accepting of our mutual commonalities and differences, and in turn, the hope is that through such collaboration, greater understanding, tolerance, an coexistence will be fostered.

Q [IRC Addis Ababa]: is this chat continue only 4 this night? if not are u always on IIP live chat?

A: Dear friends, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all for participating in this webchat. I recognize that there is a great need and a great interest in addressing these questions. Unfortunately, our time is limited and I am unable to answer all of your questions today. I am excited about the opportunity to continue this online discussion and I will plan to chat with you all sometime soon.

Best regards,
Kareema

WEBCCHAT MODERATOR: Thank you everyone for your participation today. We hope you understand that Ms. Dauod was working as quickly as she could to answer your questions. We will work with her to schedule more USINFO Webchats very soon.

Please visit our homepage for more information on our upcoming webchats:
<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html>

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